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ABSTRACT

Baseline data were gathered from 316 students in 3-year training programs at 6 New Zealand colleges of education in order to determine why the students chose to go into early childhood education, what early childhood service they expected to work in, and where they would be employed after they completed their training. Of the students who responded to the survey, 96% were female; 50% were 19 or younger and 29% were 25 or older; and 75% were Pakeha or non-Maori New Zealanders. English was the first language of 88% of the students. Nearly half of them had secondary school work experience in an early childhood center. Early findings showed that although the courses were designed to prepare students for work in a range of early childhood services, the majority of students beginning training favored working in kindergartens. In spite of some variation among colleges, the training encouraged students to think more broadly about career opportunities. Overall, students appeared to be committed to work in early childhood and to believe that their training prepared them well. Most would have liked more practical work included in the training. Most students who had completed their training were working in the service of their first choice and felt satisfied with their jobs. (LB)

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GETTING IT TOGETHER:

A Study of Early Childhood Training

Paper presented at the Fifth Early Childhood Convention
Dunedin, September, 1991

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1991

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BACKGROUND

Prior to 1988 all students wishing to train to become kindergarten teachers undertook a 2-year training course at 1 of 6 teachers' colleges, now known as colleges of education. Students wishing to train to be childcare workers had a variety of options including a 1-year course at a teachers' college or college of education or undertaking field-based training. A number of other qualifications were recognised for funding in the childcare area, but those which were specifically childcare qualifications were of varying standards and none equalled the length and breadth of kindergarten training courses.

In June 1985 the Minister of Education approved the establishment of a working party to examine 3-year training for kindergarten teachers.[1] A Second Working Party on Childcare Training reported in December, 1986.[2] Included in the terms of reference of the Childcare Working Party was the requirement:

> to examine the three-year report on kindergarten teacher training and suggest ways of incorporating childcare training within its recommendations.

In its report the working party recommended that:

> any training development for childcare be viewed as part of an integrated early childhood qualification, which should be a three-year, common-core course in early childhood education, or its part-time equivalent:

The Report of the Working Party for Kindergarten Teachers had already recommended that 3-year training be implemented in 2 colleges per year over a 3-year period. This course of action was accepted by the Department of Education. In 1988 Dunedin and Palmerston North enrolled the first intake of trainees undertaking the new integrated training course for kindergarten teachers and childcare workers. Christchurch and Hamilton followed in 1989, and Auckland and Wellington in 1990.

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER)

received a modest grant in 1988 and 1989 from the then Department of Education to enable a researcher to gather baseline data from the various intakes of students who entered the colleges to undertake the new courses of integrated training for early childhood education. The study has since been funded by NZCER. The focus of the study is to find out:

* Why students choose to train for early childhood education when they begin their training.
* What early childhood service they expect to work in when they complete their training.
* Where students are employed when they complete their training.

Methodology

The researcher visited each college at the end of the first year the colleges received students. She made return visits at the end of the students' second and third years. In each case students completed a questionnaire after a group discussion. In 1991 the students in Dunedin and Palmerston North were surveyed by postal questionnaire to ascertain their first teaching position and to comment on some of their experiences. Third-year students in Hamilton and Christchurch, and second-year students in Auckland and Wellington, will be asked to complete a further questionnaire in the third term of 1991.

This Report

This report includes findings from each year of our study but as the study is ongoing it is important to note that we have complete data across all colleges from first-year students only. Because the new course of early childhood training were introduced by 2 colleges per year, our data for second-year students apply to 4 colleges only, Hamilton, Palmerston North, Christchurch, and Dunedin, and our data from third-year students are from 2 colleges only, Palmerston North and Dunedin. The third-year data are further limited by the fact that most Dunedin trainees are also preparing for a B.Ed. degree, which meant that many of them were full-time

university students in their third year and are not completing the college component of their course until their fourth year in 1991. For this reason, most of our data from third-year students are from Palmerston North, as are our data from year-one teachers. Furthermore, because the introduction of the course has been staggered across colleges, students began their training in different years. We have attempted to compare student responses across colleges according to whether students were in their first, second, or third year, but in our study there is a difference of 3 years between when the first and third intakes began their training. In a rapidly changing educational world, differences in starting dates may also influence students' attitudes towards various issues.

SAMPLE

Table 1 shows the number of students by college who completed questionnaires in each year.

Table 1

Students who completed questionnaires

	Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Year Four
1988	Pm.Nth N=44 Dn N=28			
1989	Hn N=37 Ch N=51	Pm.Nth N=36 Dn N=27		
1990	Ak N=99 Wn N=57	Hn N=30 Ch N=32	Pm.Nth N=32 Dn N= 8	
1991		Anon = 3	Anon = 3	Pm.Nth N=29 Dn N= 9 (Students now first-year teachers)
Total	316	128	43	38

First-Year Students

Gender

Of the 316 students who completed the questionnaire, 302 (96%) were female and 10 (3%) were male. Christchurch had a disproportionate number of male trainees - four out of the ten males came from this college.

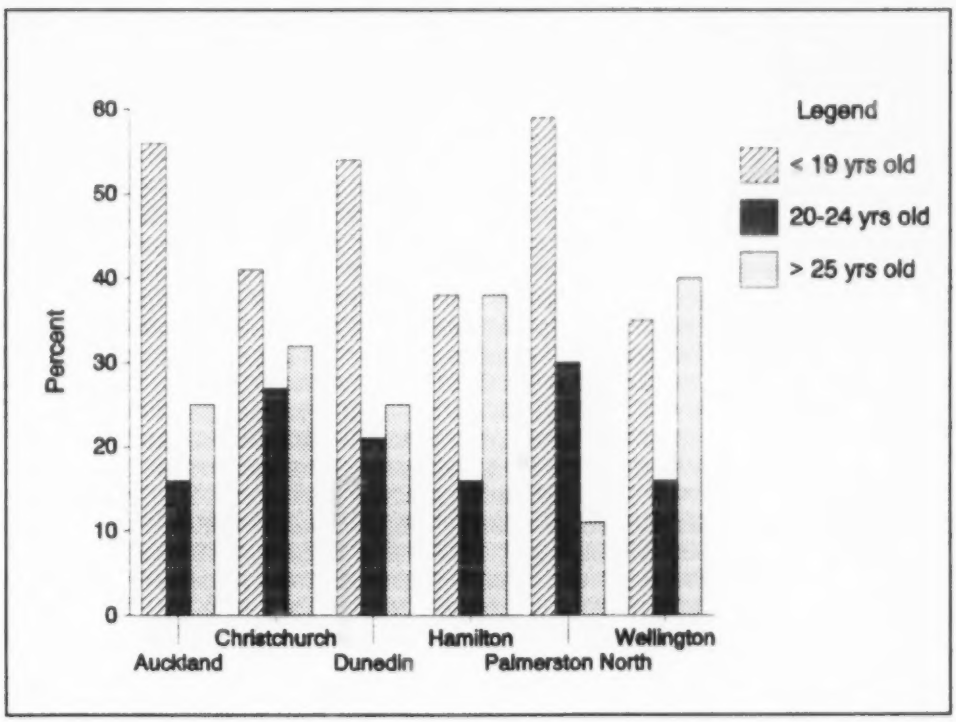
Age

Half of the students 151 (50%) were 19 years or younger; 64 (21%) were between 20-24 years of age; 89 (29%) were 25 years or older. Palmerston North students tended to be younger than those in the other colleges with only 5 students (11%) 25 years of age and older. In the other colleges between 21% and 42% of their students were 25 years or older.

Figure 1

Age of Students

(N = 304)

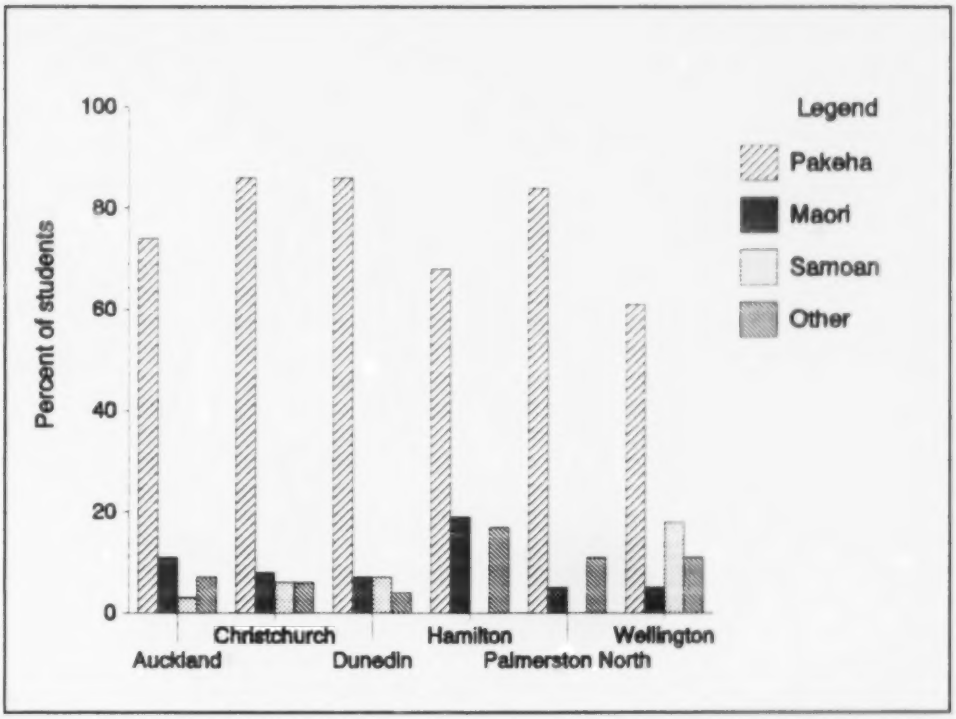


Ethnicity

Three-quarters of the students (235) described themselves as Pakeha or non-Maori New Zealanders. A further 26 (8%) described themselves as Maori. More than a quarter (27%) of the students who described themselves as Maori were from the Hamilton College of Education. The third largest group of students described themselves as Samoan (16), most of them attending the Wellington College of Education.

Figure 2

How would you describe yourself?
(N = 307)



As one would expect, English is the first language of most students (88%), followed by Samoan (4%) and Maori (3%). Other languages mentioned include Polynesian, Asian, Tokelauan, Cantonese, African, Korean, and Tongan.

PREVIOUS EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

Secondary Work Experience

Almost half (46%) of the students said they had secondary school work experience in an early childhood centre and for most this had influenced their decision to train in this field. This was particularly true in Dunedin, where all 12 students who had had secondary work experience in early childhood centres said this had influenced their decision to train in early childhood education.

Students as Parents

One-quarter of the students (80) were themselves parents. All but 2 of the parents had used early childhood services for their own children. Most had used either 2 or 3 services with 1 parent using 6 services and a further 4 parents using 5 early childhood services.

The early childhood services used most often were:

- NZ Free Kindergarten (67%)
- Playgroup (41%)
- Playcentre (37%)

A quarter of the parents indicated that their children had attended an all-day childcare centre; 24% had their child minded regularly by a paid caregiver. Thirteen parents (16%) had attended a kohanga reo with their children, and 11 parents (14%) had used sessional childcare. Private kindergartens and Pacific Island language nests were both used by 7 parents (9%).

Work in Early Childhood Centres

More than half of the trainees (171) said that they had worked in an early childhood centre before they started the course, often in more than one.

Sixty-five students were volunteers, 63 indicated that they were paid employees, and 30 were parent helpers. The remaining students fell into an "other" category which included untrained reliever, nanny trainee, and school work

experience.

As such a high proportion of trainees had had some experience of early childhood services before entering college, it is not surprising that virtually all students felt they knew something about early childhood training when they started the course, with 80% saying they knew either 'a little' or 'quite a bit'.

REASONS FOR CHOOSING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

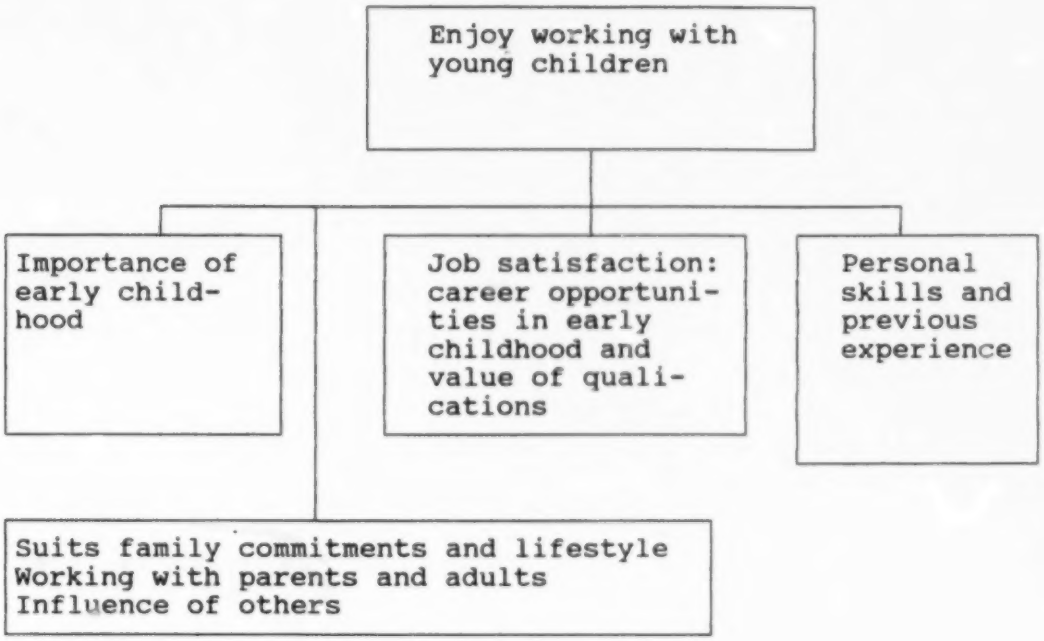
The students were asked to respond to the statement:

I chose to train for early childhood because:

The reasons given by students are summarised in the diagram below.

Diagram 1

Reasons for training for early childhood


Enjoy working with young children
Importance of early childhood
Job satisfaction: career opportunities in early childhood and value of qualications
Personal skills and previous experience
Suits family commitments and lifestyle
Working with parents and adults
Influence of others

Enjoy Working With Young Children

The most common reason given by most students for wanting to train to work in early childhood was a love of young children and pleasure in their company. Such students also often commented that they had wanted to work with this age group for a number of years.

The Importance of Early Childhood

About a third of the students referred to the importance of the preschool years which many regard as the basis for or key to future education and experience:

> I believe early childhood is a vital part of education and I want to contribute in the best possible way.
>
> I believe the years 0-5 are the most important in development. I want to be involved in children of this age group and feel that I was contributing to their development.

Students frequently referred to an interest in child development and a desire to find out more about how children learn and develop. For some, this was because of a strongly held belief in children's rights - all children have a right to care and education. Students want to play their part in providing a loving and supportive environment which will help children develop their own self-esteem and empower them.

Job Satisfaction

About a third of the students also referred to job satisfaction and career opportunities in early childhood education. For some, particularly those who enrolled in the first years of the new integrated training courses, it was because they thought early childhood was an expanding area:

> I felt it is a growth service at present with exciting things happening and I want to be part of it.
>
> Growing industry: early childhood really starting to go places.

Others saw training for early childhood as enabling them to get started on a stable, secure career which would be "rewarding" and "challenging". Early childhood provides an opportunity to work with people, rather than to work in an office. The work is varied, with scope for personal initiative. Several students said they wanted to work in education and they preferred early childhood to primary or secondary because of the more "relaxed atmosphere". (One or two students also acknowledged that their academic qualifications would not have enabled them to enter training for other branches of the education service.) The hours of work and regular holidays are also attractive. Early childhood training provides students with qualifications which would be useful for overseas travel or for work in areas of particular interest, such as caring for special needs children or as a nanny. Yet others liked early childhood education because it was a community-based service.

Students also commented on the importance of gaining

professional qualifications and the fact that a qualification in early childhood could be a useful basis for further, more specialised training, for example, one student thought she would later like to train to be a child psychologist and another wanted to be a speech therapist. Students enrolled at the university considered the degree "an extra plus".

Personal Skills and Previous Experience

About a quarter of the students referred to skills they had which made them particularly suitable for working with young children. These were commonly personal qualities such as "energy", "patience", "a sense of humour", or an "ability to communicate with young children". They felt their experience showed that not only did they like young children but young children enjoyed them.

> I feel I have a great relationship with all children. They like me and I like them.
>
> I can offer them a great deal - ideas, time, love.

Other students said that they had particular skills such as artistic abilities which would be useful. A number of students referred to experiences they had had in a range of early childhood services including working for the crippled children's society, social work, being a parent helper at school, being involved with families as a minister's wife, and work experience as a school pupil. This work was frequently voluntary, but there were students who had previously been in paid employment in early childhood, including those who had worked overseas. Several students referred to earlier work in a kohanga reo, which they had usually done without special training, and they now thought that both for their own satisfaction and the sake of the children with whom they were working, they should undertake more formal training. One student said she wanted to:

> Take the Pakeha knowledge to te kohanga reo enhancing the parallels between the two systems.
>
> These students usually had a particular desire to work

with Maori children. A similar group were interested in being closely involved with Pacific Island children.

Several students said they thought their experience as a parent qualified them particularly for work in the area.

Miscellaneous

In a range of other comments there were students who referred to the fact that a career in early childhood fitted in with their lifestyle and family commitments. When students spoke of family commitments, they were sometimes talking of their own children who were also preschoolers, but in other cases it was older children becoming less dependent and so enabling the parent(s) to train for a career themselves. Some solo parents were interested in providing a "secure future" for themselves and their children. Yet another group of students were looking forward to the time when they would become parents and they thought an early childhood training, as well as leading to a job now, would also prepare them for their parenting role.

A few students said they wanted a career where they worked with adults as well as children. One or two of these had been influenced by the women's movement and wanted to work "with and for women"; a few referred to the influence of others, usually mothers, in their decision to train for early childhood; and a few said they were training for early childhood because other careers were difficult to get into. One or two were motivated by religious conviction.

COMMITMENT TO EARLY CHILDHOOD

In an attempt to ascertain whether students were committed to work in early childhood or would perhaps prefer to work elsewhere, we asked them to respond to a series of statements:

* Working in early childhood was my first choice of career.
* I would have preferred to train as a primary teacher.
* I would have preferred to train as a secondary

teacher.

* Apart from breaks for personal reasons (e.g., travel, family), I expect to make a lifelong career in early childhood education.
* I rather "drifted" into early childhood education.
* Being a student is probably as important to me as thinking about my future as an early childhood worker.
* Had it been possible, I would have preferred to do field-based training.

The student responses across all colleges are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2

Students' commitment to early childhood education

Statement of motivation	No. of students	% of students
Early childhood lifelong	199	65
Early childhood first choice	186	60
Enjoy being a student	106	34
Drifted in	45	16
Prefer primary	32	10
Prefer field based	56	17
Prefer secondary	3	

It will be seen that when they began their training about two-thirds of the students over all indicated that they intended to make a lifelong career in early childhood and that early childhood was their first choice of career. However, a third also said that being a student was as important to them

as thinking about their future as an early childhood worker. There were variations by college in the students' responses to these questions. Some of these were:

* Students in Dunedin were most likely to say early childhood education was their first choice of a career (75%), and students in Hamilton (54%) and Auckland (58%) were least likely to say this was the case.
* Students in Dunedin were also most likely to regard early childhood education as a lifelong career (75%), as were students in Hamilton (70%); students in Wellington (56%) and Auckland (61%) were least likely to see it as a lifelong career.
* Students in Palmerston North were the most likely to say they rather "drifted" into early childhood education, (27%), while 22% of students in Christchurch also responded in this way.
* Students in Hamilton were the most likely to say they would have preferred a field-based training (27%), followed by Christchurch (20%) and Wellington (19%). Only 3 Dunedin students indicated this was the case.
* Of the 32 students who said they would have preferred to train for primary teaching, 14 came from Auckland and 7 from Palmerston North. Several of these latter students commented that when they enrolled they had thought the course was intended to prepare students to work with children from birth to 8 years.

FIRST YEAR STUDENTS WHO EXPECT TO COMPLETE THE COURSE OF TRAINING

At the end of their first year most students expected to complete their course. The percentage was highest in Dunedin and Palmerston North where 89% of students thought this would be the case, and lowest in Wellington, 74% of students. Only five students from all colleges said they did <u>not</u> expect to complete the course, most of the remainder being at this stage, 'unsure'. The most common explanation was financial problems. Family considerations, travel, and a wish to pursue

other careers were reasons given by other students. A few students from each college, said they did not like the course.

PREFERRED EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICE

First-year Students

It was common for students beginning their training to have a clear idea of which early childhood service they would like to work in when they completed their training, although there was some variation between colleges as can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3

Students who have a clear idea of preferred early childhood service (N = 315)

College	N	%
Auckland	66	67
Hamilton	26	70
Palmerston North	34	77
Wellington	37	65
Christchurch	39	77
Dunedin	15	56
Total	217	

Over all, nearly 70% of students across all colleges said they had a preferred service in mind, but the percentage of students by college ranged from 56% in Dunedin to 77% in Palmerston North and Christchurch.

Students Who Prefer Kindergartens

Of the students who said they had a preferred service, a high proportion, 78% over all, indicated that their preferred service was a kindergarten. Once again there were variations by college as seen in Table 4.

Table 4

Percentage of students with a preferred service, who prefer kindergarten

College	N	%
Auckland	44	67
Hamilton	15	58
Palmerston North	29	85
Wellington	29	78
Christchurch	36	92
Dunedin	13	87
Total	166	

Although over all, 70% of those students who said they had a preferred service said they preferred kindergarten, this was least likely to be the case in Hamilton, where only 58% of students said they preferred kindergarten, and most likely to be the case in Christchurch, where 92% said kindergarten was their preferred service. It is important to stress that the percentages we are talking about refer to those students who said they had a preferred service in the first place. If we take the sample as a whole and look at the percentage who say they prefer kindergarten, the percentages are considerably lower as seen in Table 5.

Table 5

Percentage of all students who prefer kindergarten

College	N	%
Auckland	44	44
Hamilton	15	41
Palmerston North	29	66
Wellington	29	51
Christchurch	36	71
Dunedin	13	46
Total	166	

Students Who Prefer Childcare

Fourteen percent or fewer of those students in all colleges who said they had a preferred service, indicated that child care would be their preferred service. Once again there were differences by college, ranging from only 5% in Hamilton, to 14% in Dunedin. (The actual number of students in each case is small - Auckland 8, Hamilton 2, Palmerston North 3, Wellington 6, Christchurch 4, and Dunedin 4.)

Students Who Prefer Nga Kohanga Reo or Pacific Island Language Nests

Nga kohanga reo and Pacific Island language nests are the preferred service of a small number of students. Nga kohanga reo were mentioned by 5 students in Auckland and Hamilton, 2 in Wellington and Christchurch, and none in Palmerston North and Dunedin. Pacific Island language nests were mentioned by 5 students in Wellington, 2 in Auckland and Christchurch, 1 in Hamilton and Dunedin, and none in Palmerston North.

Students Who Prefer Other Early Childhood Services

Ten percent of students across colleges referred to early childhood services outside the mainstream, for example, working as a nanny, working with children with special needs, and being an education officer.

Second- and Third-year Students

Students in their second and third year were also asked if they had a clear idea of which service they would like to work in. We have already seen that when they began their training 70% of students said they had a clear idea. In the second year this percentage had increased to 77%. These responses varied by college, 92% of Palmerston North students stating they had a clear idea of what service they would like to work in compared with 60% of Hamilton students. In both Christchurch and Dunedin the percentage was 78%. By their third year, 88% of students over all said they had a preferred service.

The preference of second-year students by college are summarised in Table 6.

Table 6

Preferred service of second-year students on completion of training (N = 118)

Service	Christchurch %	Hamilton %	Palmerston North %	Dunedin %
Kindergarten	56	65	59	63
All-day childcare	19	20	21	22
Sessional childcare	9	-	5	11
Kohanga reo	3	10	-	4
Pacific Island language nest	3	-	-	-
Other	9	5	15	-
Total	99	100	100	100

Students Who Prefer Kindergarten

Kindergarten remains the most preferred service of second- and third-year students, although the percentage of students with this preference dropped from 78% in their first year to 61% in their second. In the third year, the percentage rose again to 69%. (In interpeting these data, it must be stressed that the information for second- and third-year students is incomplete and the third-year data are based largely on Palmerston North students. The pattern may well change when data from all colleges are eventually included.)

Students Who Prefer Childcare

Compared with the 14% of students in their first year who said they would prefer to work in childcare, both sessional and all day, 27% of students in their second year indicated that this was the case. In the third year this percentage had dropped back to 13.

Other Preferred Services

There were also several other early childhood services mentioned by students, for example, IHC/early intervention and Montessori.

Reasons for First-year Students' Choice

♦ Kindergartens

There were 3 main reasons given by students who said they would prefer to work in a kindergarten, and all were by way of comparison with childcare.

- Firstly, the pay and conditions of service, including hours of work, "time out" between sessions, time for preparation, and holidays. (Several students noted that the kindergarten salaries were still too low but at least more reasonable than childcare.) Trainees also believe kindergartens are better equipped than childcare

centres.

- Secondly, trainees prefer the slightly older children in kindergartens. They also think the narrower age group of children easier to manage, particularly with different groups in the afternoon from the morning, and that this perhaps allows the teacher to spend more time with individuals. Some said they found working with older children "more of a challenge", others said they preferred them because of their more advanced language development, and others commented that they were not comfortable with infants and toddlers.

- Thirdly, trainees believe kindergartens are better organised and have more "structured" programmes. Kindergartens are regarded as more "educational" and the children better disciplined. Children attend more regularly, with less "coming and going". Several trainees referred to childcare centres as places where carers just "looked after children all day". They wanted to be involved in an "educational programme" rather than "just babysitting". Such students are likely to say they prefer to be involved with "children's learning" rather than to have to spend time on routine toileting and feeding, particularly the "mucky jobs".

Other aspects mentioned by a smaller number of trainees were that they only had experience of kindergartens, so they did not know much if anything about childcare before they started training; that they thought the relationship with other trained staff in kindergarten would be more stimulating; and that they believed kindergartens provided better career opportunities.

♦ Childcare

There were 3 main reasons given by students preferring childcare:

- Firstly, centres are open for longer hours and families tend to have contact over longer periods of time. This means that staff get to know both parents and children better. Because the relationship with parents and staff is closer, more of a family atmosphere is established.

- Secondly, students enjoy working with a wider age range, particularly the opportunity to work with younger children - the younger the age, the more dramatic the development.

- Thirdly, students believe childcare provides a much needed social service for working parents, particularly lower income families, and they hope more qualified staff in the service will help change community attitudes towards childcare.

♦ Nga kohanga reo and Pacific Island language nests

Trainees who chose nga kohanga reo or Pacific Island language nests as their preferred service did so almost exclusively because of the importance they placed on children learning and retaining the languages and cultures involved.

When second- and third-year students were questioned about their reasons for preferring a particular service, the reasons they gave were similar to first-year students.

Reasons Students Did Not Want To Work in a Particular Service

First-year students were asked if they had any reasons for thinking they might *not* wish to work in particular kinds of early childhood services. The students' responses by college are summarised in Table 7.

Table 7

Students who did not want to work in a particular service

College	N	%
Auckland	28	28
Hamilton	9	24
Palmerston North	20	49
Wellington	7	12
Christchurch	14	28
Dunedin	6	25
Total	84	

It will be seen that about 30% of the students over all said they had reasons for *not* wanting to work in particular centres, but there were quite marked differences in the students' responses by college, ranging from only 12% of students in Wellington, compared with 49% in Palmerston North, who said they had reasons for thinking they might not want to work in a particular service. (The pattern did not appear to change much in the second and third year. The overall percentage increased slightly in the students' second year to 35%. Thirty-three percent of those students who responded in their third year also said this was the case.)

Of the first-year students who answered "Yes" to this question, the majority said they had reasons for not wanting to work in childcare - either full day or sessional centres. By far the most common reason was poor pay and working conditions, including long hours and short holidays. As one student commented:

> My image of child care was of unqualified workers with a poor teacher/pupil ratio. I didn't want to be part of it - long hours, less pay, fewer holidays.

In a range of other reasons, mentioned by only 2 or 3 students in most cases, students referred to childcare being just a "babysitting service", to children being better off at home

with their mothers; to the lack of structure in the programme and their lack of interest in working with very young children - "crying babies and nappies!".

Another group of students said they had reasons for not wishing to work in either nga kohanga reos or Pacific Island language nests. This was almost always because they could not speak Maori or a Pacific Island language and had limited knowledge of the cultures.

When second- and third-year students were questioned about their reasons for *not* wanting to work in a particular service, the reasons they gave were similar to first-year students.

Students Who Had Changed Their Mind About Preferred Service

First-year Students

Students were asked if they had changed their mind about their preferred service since they had been at college. Table 8 summarises their responses by college.

Table 8

Students who had changed their mind about their preferred service

College	N	%
Auckland	15	15
Hamilton	4	11
Palmerston North	14	33
Wellington	7	12
Christchurch	18	35
Dunedin	6	26
Total	64	

Over all, about 22% of students across all colleges had changed their mind about their preferred service since the course began, but there were differences between colleges ranging from only 4 students in Hamilton (11%) to 18 students

in Christchurch (35%).

The majority of the students who said they had changed their mind had previously indicated that they would prefer to work in kindergarten, with some being uncertain at the beginning of their training as to which service they preferred. Many of them still did prefer kindergarten, but they indicated that at least they were now prepared to consider other services, particularly childcare. Of those students who had previously thought they would like to work in a kindergarten, most indicated that the experiences they had had on the course - particularly practical, enjoyable experiences in the field - had made them realise that they could work in childcare. They also found they quite enjoyed the younger and mixed-age group:

> At the beginning I wanted to work in a kindergarten but since then I've been posted in a day care and I really, really enjoyed it. I like having the mixed age groups and having the children for the whole day rather than the half day.

> I have changed my idea on child care being dens of unhappy, deprived children. If I could not get a job in a kindergarten I would consider a job in child care if I could have some control over policy making.

> I haven't changed my mind completely but I feel much more comfortable with infants and toddlers and feel I could enjoy working with them now that I have experience - very rewarding.

> A realisation that teachers in child care do more teaching than I originally realised.

There is a feeling amongst some students that you are "more needed" in childcare and that by having children for a longer time from an earlier age, teachers get to know parents and children better and are more influential.

One student, who originally said she wanted to work in a kindergarten, now wrote:

> I want to concentrate on special needs children and intend to (in the long term) become part of an early intervention team, in which case I see myself as going to all the centres in this capacity. This idea has built up over the year.

The students who had originally said they preferred child care were still happy to work there but had realised they could work in either setting. They had become increasingly aware of the longer hours and less attractive working conditions of childcare.

Second- and Third-year Students

In their second year, 30 (23%) of students said they had changed their mind about which early childhood service they would like to work in when they had finished their training. In their third year the figure was 8 (19%). Students often ticked more than one category. Their responses indicate that they are now more receptive to the possibility of working in a wider range of services than had been the case when they began their training.

Services for Which Course Prepares Students

Second- and third-year students were asked to indicate what services their training was preparing them for. Table 9 summarises their responses.

Table 9

What services the course is preparing students for

N = 171

Comment	2nd Year %	3rd Year %	Total %
Equally well kindergarten/ childcare	58	51	56
Prepared for all services	25	14	22
Favours kindergarten	14	35	19
Favours child-care	1	-	1
No response	2	-	2
Total	100	100	100

It will be seen that more than half (57%) of second- and third-year students over all believe their course is preparing students equally well for work in kindergartens and childcare, along with a further 23% who think their training is preparing them for work in all early childhood services. The remaining students, 20% over all, believe their course of training favours kindergartens. There were some differences by college in the responses of second year students. In particular, a higher proportion of Hamilton students than those in other colleges thought they were being prepared for all services.

TEACHING PRACTICE

Second- and third-year students were questioned about the number and range of teaching practice sections they had been on. One factor influencing the kind of practice experience offered to students is availability of centres. A higher proportion of students had had teaching practice sections in

kindergarten than in childcare centres (all day and sessional) - 78% compared with 66% of trainees. A few students had had sections in each of a range of other centres - creches, playcentres, playgroups, nga kohanga reo, Pacific Island language nests, Montessori, IHC, crippled children, and new entrant classes. Some of these latter were for short periods of about a week compared with the more usual placements of 4-6 weeks.

As well as regular sections, students from all colleges paid shorter visits to a range of early childhood centres for a variety of reasons. It is hard to quantify these but of all the colleges, students in Hamilton were likely to have made more frequent visits to the widest range of centres. Ninety-three percent of Hamilton students indicated that they had visited one of a range of centres. This percentage compares, for example, with only 19% of students from Palmerston North.

1991 SURVEY OF FIRST YEAR TEACHERS

In May 1991 a questionnaire was sent to the trainees in Palmerston North and Dunedin to find out how many were now employed in early childhood centres, and to look at their attitudes towards the course, and the training they had received. The questionnaires were sent to 46 people of whom 38 (83%) replied. Nine of these replies were from Dunedin and 29 from Palmerston North. (Fourteen of our original intake of students from Dunedin were back in college in 1991 for their third year of training, having been at the university in 1990 as part of their B.Ed. course.)

Present Situation for Those Working

Employment

We asked the trainees if they were working for an early childhood service:

- 30 (79%) were employed in an early childhood service
- 8 (21%) were not employed in an early childhood service

Number of Jobs Applied For

Most trainees had applied for at least 1 to 2 jobs in early childhood centres, and 3 people had applied for more than 6 jobs. These figures are shown below in Table 10.

Table 10

Number of early childhood jobs applied for by trainees

(N = 36)

Number of jobs	N	%
None	8	22
1 - 2	10	28
3 - 4	8	22
5 - 6	7	19
7+	3	8
Total	36	99

Type of Employment

When asked what service they were working for, the majority of trainees stated they were working in kindergartens:

- 21 (72%) working in kindergartens
- 4 (14%) working in all-day childcare
- 3 (10%) sessional childcare

Five people indicated they were relieving teachers; one of these was working in a variety of different centres and the others are included in the kindergarten figures.

Working in First Choice of Employment

When asked if their present job was their first choice of service, 25 replied "yes" and 5 "no". Of the 5 that answered "no" the reasons given for the job not being in the service of their choice were as follows:

* Two people chose the option - "There are no jobs in your first choice in the area you live in".
* Two people chose the option - "You took the first job

that was offered to you".

* One person chose - "The working conditions in your first choice were not good enough".

Length of Time in Position

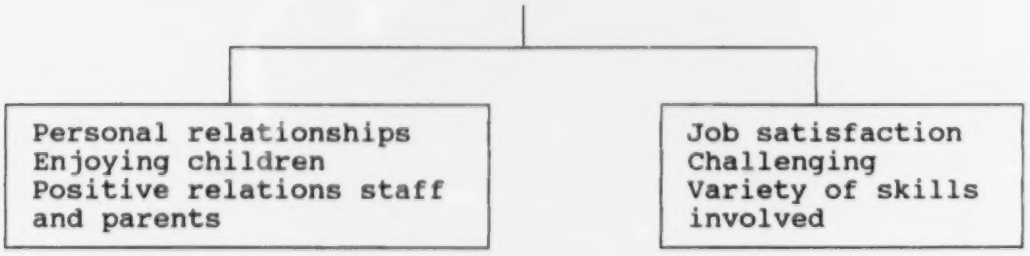
Most trainees, 15, expect to stay in their present position for 1 to 2 years; 5 for 3 to 4 years; 4 for less than 12 months; and 5 are unsure.

General Comments About Their Job

Trainees were given the opportunity to make any comments they wished about their present job. Most of their comments were positive and tended to fall into two overall categories - an enjoyment of relationships with children, staff, and parents; and an awareness of the personal resources the trainees were using in their jobs as shown by Diagram 2.

Diagram 2

Comments on present job



Teachers made general comments about their job which "they enjoyed a great deal", as well as more specific comments about their pleasure in working with the children and the positive and supportive relationships they had developed with staff and parents. The fact that staff and parents regarded them as competent increased their own confidence. The first-year teachers were challenged by the demands placed on them and the skills needed to do the job but they appeared to be coping well. There were also several positive comments about the pleasant, relaxed environment and the fact that centres

were well equipped. Negative comments included reference to inadequate staff-pupil ratios in 2 teacher kindergartens, and primary school teachers needing a better knowledge of the early childhood curriculum.

Present Situation for Those Not Working

Ten people replied to the question *What are your reasons for not working in an early childhood service?* (These 10 responses included 2 relieving teachers and the 8 people who indicated they were not working in an early childhood centre.) The reasons given were as follows:

- 7 continuing B.A. or B. Ed. (6 from Palmerston North, 1 from Dunedin)
- 1 taken position as school co-ordinator
- 1 had difficulty finding work in local area
- 1 decided not to work in early childhood services

Consider Work in Early Childhood Services in the Future

Trainees were then asked if a job were available would they work in early childhood services in the future. (This question was answered by the 8 people not working in a service and 3 relieving teachers):

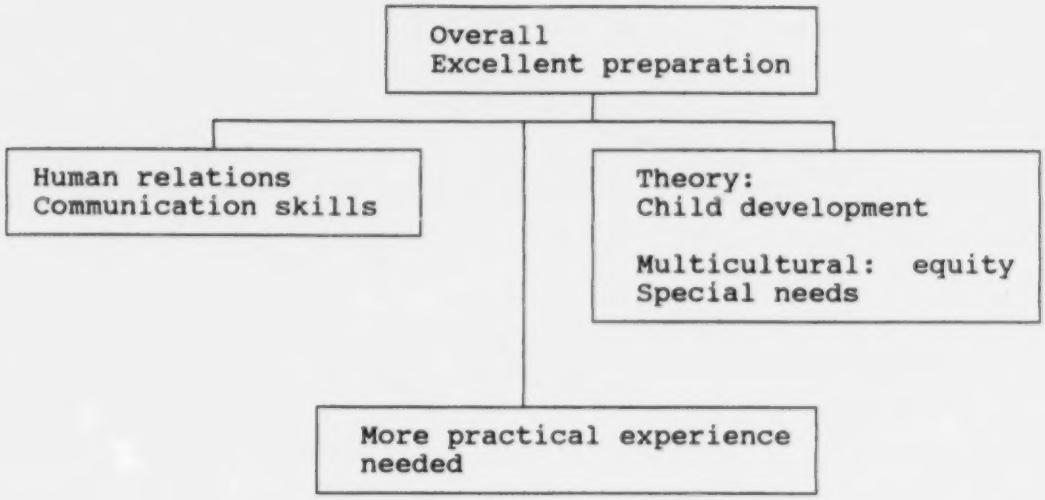
- 9 indicated they would work in an early childhood service in the future
- 2 indicated they would not work in an early childhood service in the future

Comments on How Training Prepared Trainees for Work in Early Childhood Services

Trainees were given the opportunity to make general comments on how their training had prepared them for work in early childhood education. Their responses are summarised in Diagram 3.

Diagram 3

How Training has Prepared for Work



More than half of those responding made general, positive comments to the effect that their training had prepared them well for working in early childhood services:

> Overall, it gave me an excellent training to prepare me for work.

> When I think about what I knew about early childhood education when I first started and what I know now - I learnt so much. Overall, I think training college prepared me as best it could, the rest of the learning comes with experience in the job.

> College gave me a good overview of ECE as a whole. Three years of notes are now an invaluable resource!

First-year teachers were also appreciative of the fact that their communication skills and ability to relate to other people, both children and adults, were improved by their college experience.

> Human relation classes helped me become prepared for working with a variety of people.

> Fostered ability when working with parents. Developed skills in forming personal and professional relationships.

First-year teachers also think the college prepared them well

in giving them a theoretical basis for their work with young children by increasing their knowledge of child development and how children learn.

> The lecturers were people from the services and were able to relate the theory to the practice. Only now that I'm working the theory makes more sense, and I am able to draw on my own conclusions.
>
> Professional studies incorporated a lot of theoretical things about children's learning development etc., which has been really useful.
>
> It gave me the knowledge to make decisions that enhance children's learning.

A few teachers also referred to their heightened awareness of multicultural issues along with preparation for work with children with special needs.

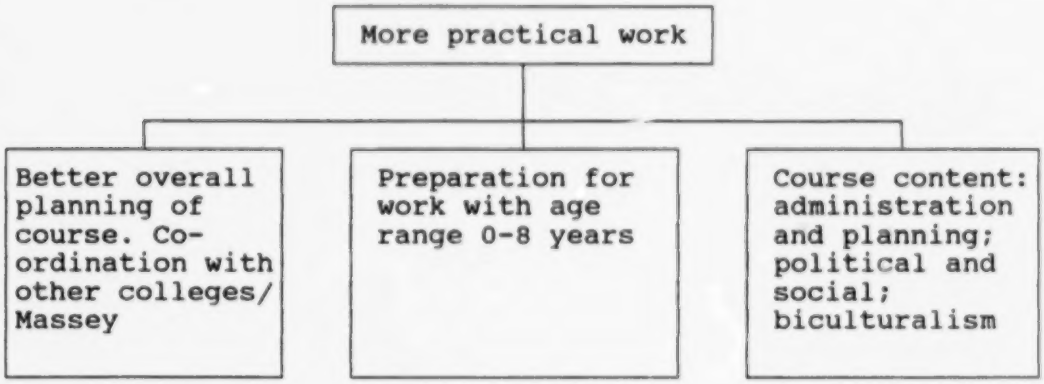
There were a few critical comments about the college programme, usually made by individual teachers, for example, one who thought there had not been sufficient emphasis on services outside the mainstream, and another who considered individual courses to be "irrelevant". The main criticism made by more than one teacher was a belief that the course would have been improved by more practical experience, particularly in the third year.

Comments on Improving Training

Trainees were asked if they had any suggestions as to how their training could be improved. Their comments tended to focus on two areas - course organisation and course content as shown by Diagram 4.

Diagram 4

Suggestions on improving training


More practical work
Better overall planning of course. Co-ordination with other colleges/ Massey
Preparation for work with age range 0-8 years
Course content: administration and planning; political and social; biculturalism

The most common suggestion as to how their course of training could have been improved, made by about half of the first-year teachers, was that there should have been more practical experience in a greater variety of centres.

> I think more practical training would have prepared me for the job more especially in the 3rd year. One day placements each week would allow for theory gained that week to be put into practice. More opportunities to collect practical resources - ideas for different areas of the curriculum.
>
> The chance to be put in varied institutions. More encouragement to have teaching practice in the harder areas of work.
>
> Teaching practices should have allowed us more time to teach and given us less written work - some was "for the sake of it".
>
> Having sections in both childcare centres and kindergartens, and then being able to specialise in field of choice, I would have liked to have collated more resources and ideas when teaching.

There was also some criticism of the overall planning of the college course, partly because it was felt that the course "was planned a year at a time". This led to time wasted and repetition. A few mature students felt there was not sufficient flexibility to take account of a student's prior

experience, and students also taking university courses thought the college and university courses were not sufficiently co-ordinated. First-year teachers who had some knowledge of courses at other colleges wondered if better links between the colleges would allow for more sharing of ideas.

It was mentioned earlier that some students from Palmerston North had been led to believe that their training would prepare them for work with children from 0-8 years, and were disappointed when this turned out not to be the case. In their suggestions for ways the course could be improved, students once again said they thought the course should train students for this wider age range. There were also those who felt that the course focused most on 3- to 4-year-old children, with insufficient time devoted to infants and toddlers.

The content of the course could be improved in the view of some first-year teachers. Those who thought this was so usually referred to more emphasis being placed on preparing students for the administration of early childhood centres, as well as more helping with planning and evaluation of programmes. A few first-year teachers also thought there should have been more emphasis during training on political and social issues, including the politics of early childhood. Others also said there was a need for more emphasis on biculturalism and issues related to the Treaty of Waitangi.

CONCLUSION

This paper is based on the experiences of students in the 6 colleges of education who are training to work in early childhood centres. Students in 2 of the colleges began their training in 1988 but others did not do so until 1990. It is too soon to draw conclusions from our data which are as yet incomplete, but certain trends have emerged. The courses are designed to prepare students for work in a range of early childhood services, but it is clear that the majority of students beginning training favour working in kindergartens. However, with some variation between colleges, the training courses are giving students an opportunity to experience a wider range of services than those with thich they were previously familiar; this is encouraging students to think more sympathetically about working in services other than kindergartens. Over all, students appear to be committed to work in early childhood and believe that their training is preparing them well for their chosen vocation. They are appreciative of the skills they have developed in human relations and communication, as well as those focused more directly on early childhood programmes and child development. Most would like more practical work included in the course. Of the students who have completed their training, a high proportion are working in early childhood centres, most in the service of their first choice, and most expressed a high level of satisfaction with their job.

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1. Report to the Minister of Education of the working party on three-year training for kindergarten teachers (1986). Wellington: Department of Education.

2. Report of the working party on childcare training (1986). Wellington: Department of Education.